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December 12, 2012

Dear Patrons, Donors and Friends,

We are writing to tell you of changes taking place at the Athenaeum. We feel it is important to communicate directly with you instead of having our news filtered by the press.

We have made a decision to reduce our personnel costs, by 8%. No radical reduction in personnel hours or services is occurring. But reducing costs is not the most important change we are making in Athenaeum personnel.

We are moving from a large group of eight people working in the library, most part-time, to a team of four people.

We have created new job descriptions for the four library positions. The new job descriptions are in response to changes in the needs of our patrons, changes in the technology that underlies access to information, and changes to our management structure. As of February 1<sup>st</sup>, we will have just one management position, the position of Executive Director, now held by Matt Powers. All Athenaeum employees will report to Matt.

We are adding a new position to the Athenaeum staff, a Curator of Collections, and we are making our development position full-time, instead of part-time. We are increasing the hours of our building maintenance and security person. We are replacing our paid docents with volunteer docents, and we will use a contractor for information technology services instead of a dedicated employee.

We are following a procedure used by other libraries<sup>1</sup> to restructure staff to adjust to changing needs. It begins by giving current staff notice that their current jobs are ending. We gave notice to our eight library staff last Monday, December 3<sup>rd</sup><sup>2</sup>. The next step is to invite all staff to apply for the five new positions, which we have also done. This process gives each person an opportunity to think deeply about his or her career, and to apply for the jobs they really want. A selection team, headed by Matt, will make hiring decisions.

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<sup>1</sup> Harvard University used a similar process in early 2012.

<sup>2</sup> And also our paid docents and our information technology employee.

Applicants are asked to write about their vision of the library of the future, and to give an oral presentation to the selection team, as part of the application process. We will also interview applicants with experience outside the Athenaeum. This part of the process gives the selection team an opportunity to create a balanced team.

For those staff who are not hired into one of the new positions, we are offering a severance package, access to a counseling and re-employment service, and extensions to their healthcare. We have also doubled the normal time of notice from 30 days to 60 days, in light of the upcoming holidays:-

The changes we have announced will result in staffing levels that are on a par with other comparable libraries in the State of Vermont.

We are deeply appreciative to all our staff for their warm and welcoming service to the Athenaeum and community. They gave their all as we undertook massive renovations to our national landmark building, including the replacement of the gallery skylights most recently. They've kept the doors open in all seasons, and made the Athenaeum a place of learning for all ages. We are planning several events to celebrate their contributions, and hope you will join us.

We deeply appreciate those of you who have written and called us about these changes. Below are a series of questions you have asked, and their answers.

**Q: Will all the current employees be competing for the five new positions?**

A: No. Some part-time employees have indicated they do not wish to apply for a full-time job. One staff member notified us prior to the restructuring of an intent to retire.

**Q: Will the people hired into the four new positions be qualified librarians?**

A: Yes.

**Q: All things being equal, do you prefer to fill the new positions with current staff who qualify?**

A: Yes.

**Q: Why did you choose to surprise the staff with this change?**

A: It's always a surprise to read a sentence that begins "We're sorry, but your current job is ending," even when you suspect in advance that this is coming. Staff have been aware of the concern for program changes and a sustainable budget since the joint retreat with trustees three years ago.

**Q: Were staff included in the process that led up to the decision to restructure?**

A: Yes. Our Head Librarian and Executive Director are ex-officio members of the board, and attend all board meetings. There are usually three staff present at all board meetings. Additionally, staff attend meetings of the Library Committee, the Finance Committee, the Collections Committee, and other Athenaeum committees. Our Head Librarian and Executive Director have attended all board retreats held in the last three years.

**Q: Please say more about the strategic issues that confront the Athenaeum.**

A: The largest change since the invention of the printing press has libraries around the world reeling. The information that is available on the Internet greatly exceeds the collections of any library, including the Library of Congress. Internet “search engines” make it much easier to find things. Literature that is out of copyright protection can be downloaded for free from Amazon and other websites. In focus groups with patrons held earlier this year by our Library Committee, we discovered that most of our patrons have personal devices for accessing the Internet and downloading material, including iPads, smart phones, laptops, Kindles, and Nooks.

Separately, the dour economic conditions have limited the performance of our endowment. To ensure that our endowment will be here for the next decade, and for succeeding generations, we need to cut back sharply on our withdrawal rate. Financial advisors are recommending a withdrawal rate in the range of 3% to 4% for both short and long term.

**Q: How have these technology changes affected the Athenaeum?**

A: There are many fewer people visiting the library. The numbers have declined more sharply recently as Internet service providers have been rolling out broadband service to more households and businesses, and there are fewer people who need to use our computers. There is a connection between the number of patrons and contributions to the annual fund and other fund raising events.

**Q: Is there a future for public libraries?**

A: Yes! Absolutely yes! There is an important role for public libraries, but it’s going to be different. Preparing for this new role for our library is the fundamental reason we are restructuring. Moreover, this change is occurring with great speed and we have some catching up to do. This is the reason we felt we needed to take a bold step forward, instead of small, incremental changes.

**Q: Okay, what is the new role for public libraries?**

A: In the world of libraries and access to information and literature there is great turmoil. But here are some trends we see as likely to continue:

- There will be more emphasis on programs and services and less emphasis on being a repository of information. Enhancements to programs and

services are already happening at the Athenaeum. These include an expansion of programs for the next generation such as the Acorn Club (the children's literary outreach program), the Freshman Capstone program, and a new Arts and Culture Series of lectures reacquainting the community with the Athenaeum's collections.

- There will be more emphasis on being a gathering place, especially around literature, public affairs, and the arts. This is a strength of the Athenaeum, with its 1st Wednesday's lectures, its new book presentations, and its new Arts and Culture Series. The Athenaeum is discussing the full return of Athenaeum Hall to its originally intended purpose (community gatherings), which will mean changes to the layout of the 2nd floor, making it more flexible.
- There will be more collaboration with other institutions. The Athenaeum has recently formed partnerships with Catamount Arts, Fairbanks Museum and St. Johnsbury Academy.
- Rare books and other assets will be digitized and made available more broadly. The Athenaeum has a number of important rare books headed for digitization.
- Librarians will provide more assistance to patrons doing research projects or needing help searching for specific information. Technical assistance will be included in the librarian's role.
- Libraries will provide access to super broadband - Internet so fast that movies can be downloaded in a few seconds, and an entire genome downloaded in a reasonable amount of time. The Athenaeum is slated to receive super broadband in 2013, possibly as early as late spring.
- Libraries will provide access to proprietary databases, the cost of which are out of reach to individuals.
- Not needing to be tied physically to their collections, libraries will provide programs and services offsite - to retirement homes and other venues.

**Q: I have heard or read that budget deficits as the driving force behind layoffs. Is this true?**

A: We have been withdrawing funds from our endowment at an unsustainable rate. We were deeply concerned about this three years ago at our annual board retreat, and we established then a goal of reaching financial sustainability. A year ago, we decided to make the goal more specific, giving ourselves until January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2015 to achieve a balanced budget. Our restructuring process will reduce our personnel expenses. We have two more years and a gap about twice this size to close to reach a balanced budget. Yes, the deficit budget was a factor in the restructuring, but not the most important one.

**Q: How do you intend to do this? Will there be more personnel dismissed?**

A: We intend to achieve a balanced budget through increases in revenue. We do not anticipate dismissing personnel in the future.

**Q: How will you increase revenue?**

A: We have a few strategies in place, and will add others. We are adding the position of Curator of Collections to manage our art and our collections of rare books and other artifacts. A prime reason for this new position is to generate revenue from our collections. We are increasing the Development Coordinator position to full time. But most importantly, we are launching new programs and services to make the Athenaeum more relevant to the present and the future. More relevance, more patrons ultimately leads to more contributions to the Annual Fund.

Matt Powers likes to say that the Athenaeum is a “community anchor,” an icon of St. Johnsbury. We take the preservation of this national historic building and its collections and its community responsibilities seriously, and we will not, under our watch, allow it to fade into less of a community anchor, less of a treasure to our town and our region.

Again, we thank those of you who have called and written, especially those of you with the courage to disagree with our direction. We hope this overly-long explanation of changes at the Athenaeum is helpful, and we hope you will send us your new questions and your new suggestions.

Very Cordially Yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Bill Marshall".

Bill Marshall, Chair, for the Board of Trustees